

project. It is not an earmark for Alaska. It is not even in Alaska. It is a national project, one that was triggered by national defense needs and mandated by treaty between the United States and Canada.

As a treaty obligation, it is not to be discarded lightly. It is unfortunate that some apparently have trouble reading beyond the name and that it has fallen to Alaskans to stand up for the word of honor of the United States to fund this project, but that is just the way it has been. Here again, I am grateful for the support of Senator INHOFE, Senator BOND, and others who have recognized that this is not just a parochial project but one of significance to the entire Nation and one for which the Nation has given its word.

As I mentioned, we have unique needs, unique challenges, and I renew an invitation to all of my colleagues: Come up and visit. Come up and see the State, see for yourself the conditions we have.

I had an opportunity just yesterday to demonstrate that when we talk about Alaska's road system, we use that term lightly. It is not a system; it is a road up and there is a road down and a little connector in between the two, and that is what we have. When we talk about where our roads stretch from, if we were to superimpose Alaska over the rest of the lower 48 States, we would be going from Minnesota down to Florida and across over into California. The area we cover is huge.

So, again, come up and see the conditions that we have. I would be happy to arrange a trip for any Member of the body, no matter where they stand on the issue, and I am not just talking about transportation issues. We will take the Members up and show them ANWR. We will show them the whole State. I am proud of the State, and I am proud of what we have done to preserve and protect our resources while we still build a vital economy. I would be happy to show my colleagues how we are dealing with some of our unique situations and problems.

One such unique situation has been the fact that it is literally impossible to build roads between some communities, even in long-settled areas like in southeastern Alaska where I was born, where a combination of rugged terrain and the separation of the islands have made other solutions necessary. One solution for the area in the southeast was the establishment of the Alaska Marine Highway System, which builds on a core fleet of large ocean-going vessels in service as ferries. It is the only highway possible between communities such as Ketchikan, Petersburg, Wrangell, Sitka, Juneau, our State capital, and many other smaller communities. It is part of the National Highway System.

If the definition of a highway is a facility used by trucks and cars moving from one community to another, this is, indeed, a highway. In fact, it is one that is considerably less expensive

than other options such as tunneling, like we have up in Boston, the "Big Dig," or the combination of bridges and tunnels we see around here.

The last highway bill, TEA-21, contained provisions to fund ferries and ferry terminals in addition to funding received through the National Highway System. I am pleased to say that this bill does as well. In fact, ferry system assistance in this bill is even broader and will help even more States operating ferry systems to do a better job for their citizens.

Now, I have been informed that the finance portion of the bill includes provisions based on two bills which I have previously offered. One of these provisions corrects an inequity imposed on air passengers who live in rural areas where, again, they are unconnected by road and they are forced when they are traveling to fly to a larger airport where they can catch a plane to get somewhere, to reach their final destination. All passengers currently pay a segment fee for air travel, but these rural residents I am talking about are basically forced to pay twice, while passengers who live within driving distance of a larger airport only pay once.

The second measure which I just referenced affects seaplane operators who are not using FAA facilities but currently must pay excise taxes and fees intended solely to support such facilities. This is also an inequity, and my measure will ensure that only those receiving benefits are asked to pay for them.

In addition, it is my understanding that the committee has also included a measure intended to ensure that taxes and fees intended for aircraft carrying passengers from point to point is not incorrectly applied to flight-seeing operations. Senator INOUE has taken the lead on this matter, but it is worth noting that it has significant support among my constituents in Alaska, and I am pleased to see it included.

Finally, let me note that I understand that the Commerce Committee title includes my proposal to establish State grants for motorcycle rider education. As my colleagues may be aware, motorcycle ridership is increasing all the time, and with it the number of motorcycle accidents has also been rising, particularly among the new riders. It is not necessarily the young riders but riders of any age. It is the latter that my proposal addresses. I believe firmly that the best way to prevent injuries is to prevent accidents, and training is the only way to accomplish that goal.

I have worked closely with the Motorcycle Riders Foundation and State motorcycle education administrators to develop this proposal. All too often, we will see new riders, both young and old, simply climb on and hope that they are going to learn by experience. Better training has been shown to drastically reduce the number of accidents suffered by new riders during the critical period in which their learning

curve is the steepest and they are most at risk.

From the national perspective, this highway bill is a good bill. It is not perfect, but few things are. I would prefer to see more streamlining and permitting processes for highway projects. I would like to see more flexibility for States. I would like to see a bill with the funding level that we approved last year. The leaders of each one of our key committees have done yeoman's work—and again, I want to commend the chairman—on phenomenally difficult issues. I believe at the end of the day we have before us a good bill, the best bill possible. I pledge my support for it and urge my colleagues to do the same.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, the Senator from Alaska named a list of things she would have preferred to see in the bill. As I thought of each one of them, I agree with each one. Of course, the Presiding Officer is also a member of the committee, and we know there are a lot of diverse needs in States. It is not a perfect bill. There are a lot of things I would rather have in it, but it is a consensus. It was give-and-take, and that is the way the system is supposed to work.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. INHOFE. I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period for morning business with Members permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### HONORING LESLIE SATCHER

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, in 1988 Leslie Satcher picked up her belongings and left her home in Paris, TX, bound for Nashville. With a meager \$100 in her pocket, she abandoned all that she had known in her young life, and headed to the Music City driven by her dream of being a country-music star.

Almost 2 decades later, that dream is a reality.

Today, Leslie Satcher is one of Nashville's most sought after song-writers. She has emerged as a glowing success under one of the world's brightest country-music spotlights.

At her core, Leslie Satcher is a woman of humble ambition. Her work is shaped by unyielding faith and limitless passion for music. Critics describe her writing as "emotionally persuasive, yet understated and artful." Indeed, she has found her success not by abandoning her homey roots but by embracing them.

Her lyrics are laced with plain spoken yet insightful observations about love and life. And despite her tremendous success, she has always remained true to her creative vision, never losing hold of the simple joys of writing and singing music.